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In Iran, journalists arrested, Khamenei calls media 'evil'

New York, June 19, 2009--In his first public address to the nation since demonstrations erupted in many cities across Iran, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei today blamed foreign media, calling it "evil" for attempting to divide the people of Iran. Iranian authorities continue to crack down on journalists in an attempt to control information as demonstrations continue to grip the country following last Friday's disputed presidential elections, the Committee to Protect Journalists said today.

Over the past six days, hundreds--and possibly thousands--of activists and supporters of the defeated candidates and an unknown number of journalists and bloggers have been detained by the Iranian security apparatus, according to local and international reports from human rights groups.

"The first step in any crackdown is to eliminate potential witnesses," said CPJ Middle East and North Africa Program Coordinator Mohamed Abdel Dayem. "With each arrest, deportation, and attack on a journalist, the likelihood grows of a violent government response."

Saeed Laylaz, a journalist for the daily business journal *Sarmaia* and a vocal critic of President Mahmoud Ahmedinejad's economic policy, was arrested in his home on Wednesday, his wife, Sepharnaz Panahi, told the [BBC Persian](http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/iran/2009/06/090617_op_ir88_arrests_continue.shtml) (http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/iran/2009/06/090617_op_ir88_arrests_continue.shtml) service. She said that officers searched their home and confiscated videotapes, hard disks and letters. The family doesn't know where Laylaz is being held, the BBC reported. *Sarmaia* also [covered](http://www.sarmayeh.net/PDF/88-03-28/P2.pdf) (<http://www.sarmayeh.net/PDF/88-03-28/P2.pdf>) the arrest.

On Monday, Ettelaat intelligence agents in Rasht, 150 miles (240 kilometers) northwest of Tehran, arrested Mojtaba Pour-Mohssen, editor-in-chief of the daily *Gilan Imrouz* and contributor to Radio [Zamaaneh](http://zamaaneh.com/) (<http://zamaaneh.com/>), an Internet radio station, according to the online station. It reported that agents took a computer, books, and films from Pour-Mohssen's home. Pour-Mohssen also authors a blog called [Haftha](http://poumohsen.com/) (<http://poumohsen.com/>). His blog was last updated on Saturday, CPJ research shows. Radio Zamaaneh reported that he is being held at Lakan Prison in Rasht.

The well-known blogger [Mohammad Ali Abtahi](http://www.webneveshteha.com/) (<http://www.webneveshteha.com/>), who is an advisor to the defeated candidate Mehdi Karroubi and was vice president during Mohammad Khatami's presidency (1997-2005), was arrested on Tuesday, the BBC Persian service [reported](http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/iran/2009/06/090616_he_ir88_abtahi-arrest.shtml) (http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/iran/2009/06/090616_he_ir88_abtahi-arrest.shtml). A blog [entry](http://www.webneveshteha.com/en/) (<http://www.webneveshteha.com/en/>) on his site states that he will resume writing as soon as he is released. His wife, Fatima Abtahi, told the BBC that three men in plainclothes visited his home and took him away.

Since the official results of the disputed Iranian presidential elections were announced on Saturday morning, demonstrations by supporters of the defeated reformist candidate Mir-Hossein Mousavi, who claim that the elections were rigged, have been held on a daily basis. Since demonstrations began, Iranian authorities have imposed stringent restrictions on the media. CPJ research found that they have detained an unknown number of local journalists, expelled or confined foreign journalists to their offices, and disrupted the Internet and other forms of telecommunication. Requests for visa extensions have been denied, and some local newspapers have been censored.

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